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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1628
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 001722

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: SHOOTING INCIDENT AT MANAS AIRBASE, KYRGYZSTAN

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is an Action Cable; see paras 11-14 below.

12. (C/NF) SUMMARY: On the afternoon of December 6, A KYRGYZ NATIONAL was SHOT AND KILLED BY a U.S. AIR FORCE SECURITY AIRMAN WHILE MAKING a routine FUEL DELIVERY at Manas Coalition Airbase in Kyrgyzstan. According to the airman, the KYRGYZ NATIONAL REPORTEDLY attacked him with A KNIFE, AND he responded in self defense. The incident is under investigation by both Air Force and Kyrgyz authorities. The Ambassador has been called in to see President Bakiyev on December 7 about the incident; the President will also raise the issue of the unresolved collision at the airfield between a U.S. military plane and a Kyrgyz civilian airliner. Separately, PM Kulov relayed to the Ambassador that he had heard a radically different version of the incident that indicates the Kyrgyz driver was innocently slain by the airman. There has been intense media interest in the incident, and we expect coverage on December 7 to be extremely negative toward the U.S. and the continued presence of the base. How we respond in the next 24 hours will be critical to our efforts to contain this incident; please see paras 11-14 for Embassy recommendations. End Summary.

THE INCIDENT

13. (C/NF) On December 6, Manas Base Commander informed Embassy that AT APPROXIMATELY 1500 HOURS that day A KYRGYZ NATIONAL WAS SHOT AND KILLED BY A U.S. AIRFORCE SECURITY AIRMAN. THE KYRGYZ NATIONAL WAS A FUEL TRUCK DRIVER AND WAS MAKING A SCHEDULED FUEL DELIVERY TO THE MANAS COALITION AIRBASE. THE KYRGYZ driver WAS WAITING IN A HOLDING TENT WHILE THE FUEL TRUCK WAS BEING INSPECTED, which is normal procedure.

14. (C/NF) According to the Manas Base Commander Col. Reese, AS THE AIRMAN OPENED THE FLAP OF THE TENT TO INFORM THE KYRGYZ THAT THE VEHICLE WAS CLEAR, HE SAW THE KYRGYZ NATIONAL BRANDISHING A KNIFE OVER HIS HEAD AND MOVING TOWARDS HIM. AT THAT TIME, THE AIRMAN DREW HIS WEAPON AND FIRED TWO SHOTS at THE KYRGYZ NATIONAL. Base officials rendered Emergency First Aid to the Kyrgyz national and transported him to the Base ER. He was declared dead on arrival at the ER.

15. (C/NF) THE AREA has been SECURED by THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS AND A MORE THOROUGH INVESTIGATION is UNDERWAY. Investigators have custody of both the weapon used by the Airman and the knife belonging to the Krygyz national. REPRESENTATIVES OF THE KYRGYZ MINISTRY OF INTERIOR, NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE SERVICE, PROSECUTOR GENERAL'S OFFICE AND MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS inspected the site and spoke with Col. Reese. In addition, the deputy chief of the Presidential Administration and Acting National Security Advisor also visited the base and spoke to Col. Reese. THERE was ALSO A sizeable MEDIA PRESENCE AT THE AIRBASE, but the journalists had dispersed as of 1800 local time.

KYRGYZ REACTION: EMOTION, FRUSTRATION, OUTRAGE

16. (C) The Ambassador was called by the Minister of Transportation, who was extremely emotional and said this event has caused airport personnel to raise the issue of shutting down the base completely. The Ambassador relayed her understanding of the incident) that it was an act of self-defense) and cautioned him to refrain from jumping to conclusions as the facts were still being ascertained. She noted it was important to keep the tragedy in context and not make it a political issue.

17. (C) The Ambassador also spoke by phone to Prime Minister BISHKEK 00001722 002.2 OF 003

Kulov, who listened carefully as she relayed the events. He responded that he had heard a very different version of what occurred. His understanding was that the Krygyz driver was sitting in a tent, cleaning a small, perhaps home-made knife.

A U.S. Airman demanded that the Kyrgyz driver leave the tent, and a verbal altercation ensued. As the driver was leaving, the U.S. Airman apparently became frightened, and shot the driver. Kulov commented to the Ambassador that the types of weapons used by the base personnel were "unacceptable." He said it would be virtually impossible under Kyrgyz law to claim that this was self-defense; the airman should have fired a warning shot in the air before shooting the driver. He asked under what law the airman's actions would be judged; the Ambassador responded that he fell under the U.S. Military Code of Justice. The PM also urged the Ambassador to take a "human approach" and reach out to the family of the driver, and offer them some financial help. He said this would not in any way imply an admission of guilt on the U.S. side, and the gesture could even be accompanied by a letter to this effect.

FOREIGN POLICY ADVISOR: A HIGHLY POLITICIZED INCIDENT

18. (C) The Ambassador spoke to Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Ibragimov, who said that unfortunately, this incident was becoming highly politicized. He informed the Ambassador that President Bakiyev wanted to meet with her on December 7 at 1100. He said the President wanted to discuss this latest incident, but he would likely raise the incident of the collision between a U.S. refueling tanker and a civilian Kyrgyz airliner, and express Kyrgyz ire that the US has not shared its investigative report with them.

19. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Sarbayev called in the Ambassador late on December 6 and requested urgent information on the incident and help for Kyrgyz authorities to have access to the Base and the scene of the incident. He also suggested that a Joint Working Group be established; the Ambassador relayed this request to Colonel Reese. Ambassador

also spoke with Acting Procurator General Abdilyevich to express condolences and U.S. readiness to provide assistance with a Kyrgyz investigation. She also called the Minister of Interior and the Chairman of the SNB, who will call back.

¶10. (C) Embassy and Base public affairs section have coordinated press guidance, which has been emailed to SCA/PPD. Embassy PAO and FSN went to the Base to assist on site with the press and coordinate strategy for December 7.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Clearly, this is not only a tragedy for the family of the Kyrgyz driver, it is a serious bilateral issue which is raising questions) once again) about the presence of the Base. PM Kulov has taken personal charge of the incident and has provided instructions that law enforcement agencies conduct an honest and fair investigation. That said, the public and parliamentary outrage that an American serviceman shot a Kyrgyz national will put the government under a great deal of pressure to show that it is defending its citizens. Ibragimov has already warned us that the incident has become political. We fear that even if it is proved beyond any doubt that the Kyrgyz national attacked our servicemen, the Kyrgyz public and authorities will question why no warning shot was fired) as they are already doing. The differences in our practices are causing individuals to question whether the Base is endangering Kyrgyz citizens) a question often asked after the September collision.

¶12. (C) How we respond in the next 24 hours will be critical to our efforts to contain this incident and to how

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we are perceived. There are two components that we need to focus on immediately: how we handle the bereaved family and how we address the substantive concerns regarding the shooting incident. We also need to address as well the resolution of the collision.

¶13. (C) THE FAMILY: Ambassador is prepared to reach out to the Kyrgyz next-of-kin, offer condolences, and attend the funeral (which may be as early as December 7). We are seeking RLA's advice as to whether a small collection from private individuals on the Base and from the Embassy could be provided to the driver's family to help defray funeral expenses. If there is a DOD mechanism to provide compensation to the family, we should explore this option immediately, as we are already getting inquiries about how support for the bereaved family members of the 42 year old driver.

¶14. (C) SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES: So far, the investigation seems to be proceeding apace and the Base is looking into the possibility of establishing a Joint U.S.-Kyrgyz Working Group. However, this tragedy, following so closely after the September collision raises serious questions on the part of the Kyrgyz as to whether it is worth having a U.S. Base here. The Kyrgyz are connecting the two incidents and resolving the collision has now become much more complicated. At a minimum, Ambassador needs to be able to tell President Bakiyev during their December 7 meeting the date when the Accident Investigation Board results will be forthcoming and what has caused the delay. Post strongly recommends that an expert team be dispatched to inspect the damaged Tupolev, so that we can at least discuss amongst ourselves what the options are to provide assistance in repairing the plane. It would be helpful to be able to tell President Bakiyev on December 7 that we are doing this. Unfortunately, this tragic incident has raised the stakes regarding resolution of the collision) and we need to take that into account as we consider how to respond to this incident.

YOVANOVITCH